

Proof

"Why are we out here again?" Margaret asked to no one in particular, even though the only other person in the cockpit of their cargo ship was her husband Bob.

"We are going to be spending the next year making the solar system a safer place by mapping the rocks in the outer solar system. Plus we are looking for new deposits of minerals." Bob replied without looking up from autopilot controls. "Remember? 'We are doing a great service to our people! Making space travel to the outer system safer for all.' At least that's what the guy with the space agency said." Bob added with a bit of sarcasm.

Margaret turned in the pilot's chair and looking right at Bob and said, "No, really, why are we out here?"

This caused Bob to stop what he was doing and let out a small sigh. Turning to face her, he said, "You know as well as I that we were desperate for the money. With the big companies moving into the shipping business, it is getting harder and harder for the small little outfits like us to get work. We've hardly had any work in the last year. And even though the pay isn't all that great, they did pay for fuel and provisions. This one run will get us all caught up with our creditors. If we take another trip like this next year, we will be completely in the black."

"I know, I know. I just can't believe we are going to be stuck on our ship for a year with those egg heads. They have next to no personality and no sense of humor."

"Come dear, this is only the second week of our trip. We won't even reach where we are supposed to start mapping for another 4 weeks." Margaret responded to Bob's words by putting on her best pouty face. She really wasn't that upset, but she did like to be comforted by Bob.

Seeing the pouty face, Bob put on his best smile and walked over to her and held her in his arms. "There, there dear. It's going to be all right. I'll protect you from the big bad humorless scientists."

Bob and Margaret had been married for over 10 years and they still loved each other very much. They had met in the air force and after they were both out, they were married. Although they had no children, they considered their ship, the Meriwether, their baby. It had taken them 5 years to save enough for the down on it and they had spent the last 5 years running the more lucrative, but risky outer planets cargo routes. Those jobs paid better as they were very long duration runs and much of the space ways were not charted. The risks had been worth it as they were still married and the Meriwether was almost paid for. The Meriwether might be a 50 year old ship and out of date by modern standards, but it was their pride and joy and they would not allow anyone to talk bad about her.

After a minute of holding her, Bob loosened his hug and looked down into her brown eyes. Whenever Bob was mad at his wife, all he had to do was look into those eyes and he would remember why he loved her so much. "All better now?" he asked her.

She nodded, trying to look as sad and cute as possible. She loved the attention he gave her and she knew that this look melted his heart. Many people considered Bob a gruff and hard man, but in her arms, he was like softened butter.

"Good. Now back to flying this ship. I wouldn't want to crash into a planet because you were busy lovin' on the co-owner." It was a running joke they had. It was almost impossible to crash into a planet as there would be major collision warnings before they even got close. "Besides, I have to finish programming this Autopilot. We've only been out this far twice and I don't trust the charts the government gave us." He walked back to what he was doing.

She turned back to the controls and said with a wry smile: "Fine, be that way. But how do you know crashing into a planet wouldn't be fun?"

"You said the scientist don't have a sense of humor? Hmmm. Maybe I should start spending time with them."

The only reply he got to the comment was to have a piece of paper thrown at him. The little exchange had made both of them smile.

It was at that moment that the collision klaxon began to sound. The alarm made Bob turn towards his wife. "You WERE just kidding about crashing into a planet, right?" He said in jest.

Annoyed by the comment, she replied "Of course." Examining the sensor display, she said "Looks like we have a small asteroid heading our way. We will cross its path in 6 hours.

"An asteroid already?" he said turning to the computer to check the charts. "There is nothing in the charts about it."

"Well, it looks like the egg heads have their first rock. Want to let them know?"

"Sure." Bob turned to the intercom control and told Dr. Langley that they had the first rock for them to examine. Dr. Langley was an older scientist and Bob was pretty sure he must have pissed someone off to be stuck on this trip with a bunch of College grads to baby sit. Yep, this was going to be a very long year. Turning back to his wife, Bob said "I wonder what it's made of? Maybe it's solid gold?"

"Hmm." was the only response he got from his wife.

With a little concern in his voice he said "What is it dear?" He had learned over the years that "Hmm" from Margaret could mean something interesting to something deadly. This far out in the system, he didn't care for either.

"Oh, well it's that asteroid. I'm not sure it's an asteroid at all. Look here at the scans of it." She pointed to the screen, moving so Bob could look over her shoulder to see. "The mass isn't right and see this?" She pointed to the screen. "That looks like it could be an antenna dish."

"You think this might be a piece of an old wreck?" He asked

"Either that or maybe an old space probe."

"Really?" Bob said as he looked up and out the front window. "Let's see what the egg heads find out. Maybe we can salvage it and sell it to some museum. Our contract does say we have salvage rights to anything man made we find on this trip. I don't think the government thought we would find anything out here."

"Salvage rights?" Margaret said with some excitement in her voice. "I just might start liking those egg heads after all. Let's just hope they say the right things." She said, raising her eyebrows the way she did when she could feel a big payoff coming. She turned back to the display screen, trying to see what she could make of the object.

Two days later

"Mister President. I am sorry to disturb you like this." Dr. Alicia Grover was a scientist and astrophysicist. She was not a politician. She was never really sure why President O'Brian had picked her to be his Secretary of Space. She hated public speaking and politics in general. The only reason she could think of why she got the job was that she had dated the President when they were in college. Maybe she was the only astrophysicist he knew and he wanted a scientist to be on his cabinet. He was not very popular in the scientific community,

"Well, this had better be good Dr. Grover. I can't believe you asked for the Secretary of Defense to be here too. This had better not be about some rock that in 500 years may or may not crash into the planet like last time." President O'Brian didn't bother trying to keep the displeasure out of his voice. O'Brian was man of action and he didn't care much for scientist types. He knew that science was importance, but that didn't help him like scientists any better.

Security of Defense General Calvin King let out a small chuckle, remembering how last time Dr. Grover had called a major press conference and wanted to tell people to start evacuation planning of the planet because a rock could hit the planet in 500 years and if it did, then it would wipe out all life on earth. President O'Brian was furious with her for trying to hold a press conference without going through him first. He kind of felt sorry for the scientist as she was so politically inept, but with President O'Brian's dislike of scientists, helping her out could spell the end of his political career.

The chuckle threw Dr. Grover off a little, but she continued "No sir, this is a little more earth shattering."

That comment made both of them sit up. Considering last time was about the end of all life on the planet, what could be worse than that?

"OK, you have my attention, what is it." President O'Brian said with a little apprehension.

"Well, as you may remember sir, three weeks ago we started operation Darkest Night." She paused looking for some recognition in the Presidents eyes but found none. Why did she fill out reports for him if he wasn't going to read them. "It was a mission to plot the course of objects in the outer solar system?" Still nothing clicked. "We were going to plot the course of all the objects in the outer planets so space travel would be safer out there?"

Annoyed, President O'Brian said "And....."

Letting out a small sigh, she continued. "Anyway, two weeks into the mission, long before they even reached the outer solar system, they came across something."

"And let me guess, it's going to crash into the planet." O'Brian added in a snide manor. Listening to scientists always made President O'Brian feel stupid.

"Although it would have hit the planet, that is not the earth shattering part. The object is so small that it would have burned up in the atmosphere."

"SO WHAT IS THE EARTH SHATTERING PART?" O'Brian finally burst out. Dr. Grover had such a bad habit of taking forever to say the simplest things.

"The object is of artificial in nature." She said, waiting for them to realize what that meant. President O'Brian continued to have a lost look on his face, obviously not understanding what that meant.

General King understood though, causing him to sit up and give his full attention to the young scientist. Knowing the President would not understand what that meant, he said "Sir, it means that someone made it. It's not a natural object."

"That's right." Excitement had entered Dr. Grover's voice as she felt she finally had someone who could understand the importance of this find. "We think it's a probe of some kind and it doesn't match our records of anything we sent out into space. Not us or anyone else. In fact early dating puts the object at over 400,000 years old."

The general said for the sake of the president, but didn't take his eyes off the scientist "She said that it's not any of our old space junk and they think it's older than any race on this planet."

President O'Brian just kept looking back and forth between the two and finally said "That's crazy. Are you saying that little green men made it?"

The general ignored the comment from the president. "Is it active?"

"No General, not that we can tell. The object looks like it has impacted with a small asteroid as it shows some damage."

"Then what makes you think it's a probe?" General King and Dr. Grover were in full conversation, completely ignoring the President.

"We have been able to figure out some of the parts that were not damaged. We have found what we think is a camera and an antenna. Dr. Langley and his team are still examining it."

"So you're saying its some type of surveillance device sent to spy on us?" The General was in full military mode now.

"Honestly, we don't know. We have been able to figure out its simpler technology, but other stuff we have no idea what it's for. We need to do a lot more research and get it to a real lab."

"Where's the device now?"

"I ordered the ship back to Newport station the minute I received the report. I also ordered them to talk to no one about it."

"Good thinking, Dr. Grover." The General replied. "How many people are on that ship? Who all knows about this?"

"Well, there is Dr. Langley and his team of five grad students, the crew of the Meriwether, which I believe there are two and now the three of us. Dr. Langley recognized the importance of the find and sent a coded message directly to me."

At this point, President O'Brian was fit to be tied. "Excuse me. Remember me? Commander in Chief? The boss of both of you? The guy in charge?" The President looked at them both.

It was the General that finally addressed the President. "Forgive us sir. I was just assessing the danger to national security of this new situation. This is a very serious matter and Dr. Grover was correct in call this meeting. She was even smarter in recalling the ship and ordering then on radio silence." General King paused to let the importance of what he was saying to the President sink in. "I recommend we continue the radio silence and send the ship with the artifact to our facilities at Lunar Base Tranquility. We can keep better control on the situation there."

President O'Brian nodded in agreement, but Dr. Grover asked "You mean the Government agricultural facility?"

General King answered "Yes and no. We have a secret lab located there. The agricultural facility is just the cover. It is top of the line lab, best in the solar system."

The President finally spoke up: "Yes, that sounds like a good plan. Make is so." Turning to his Secretary of Space, "Dr. Grover, you did the right thing bringing this to my attention. Knowledge of the base is a Top Secret and you are not to speak to anyone about it."

"Thank you sir, but I have a request then." She replied.

"Oh?" the President replied.

"I would like to go to Tranquility Base and lead the investigation personally. This is a once a life time opportunity sir."

President O'Brian turned to look at his Secretary of Defense. After a quick nod from the general, the President said "Very well. General King will contact you about your travel arrangements. You will also report all your findings to General King. He will be in charge of this project. He will keep me apprise of your findings. Remember, not a word about this to anyone."

"Yes sir." Dr. Grover replied with a huge smile on her face.

"You're dismissed." Dr. Grover turned and walked out the room. President O'Brian turned to General King. "Are you sure it was a good idea to let her go to the base? It's a top secret base and she doesn't have the clearance."

"Sometimes it easier to keep a secret contained when all the pieces are in one place, sir." General King replied.

"Ah, that's true. So do you think this thing is some spy device from some ET?" He asked with a hint of jest.

Very flatly, General King replied "I don't know, but that is what we are going to find out."

One month later

"Attention ladies and gentlemen." Dr. Grover addressed the collection of scientist at the conference table at Tranquility base. "I thank you all for being here. I realize that you are all excited to get started. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Dr. Alicia Grover, Secretary of Space. I will be the liaison to President OBrian. To my right are Doctor Allen Polski and his staff. Dr. Polski is in charge of this facility will be leading this project. To my left are Dr. Leo Langley and his team of grad students. They made the find and have been analyzing it for the past month aboard the Meriwether. And in the back of the room are Mr. and Mrs. Richardson. They are the owners of the Meriwether and have graciously agreed to stay and help anyway they can."

"Our contract says we have the salvage rights on that thing. We are not letting that thing out of our site." Bob spoke out.

"Well, there is that." Dr. Grover replied, quickly changing the subject. She turned her attention back to those at the table. "Speaking of which, where is the object now?"

"The artifact has been moved to the clean lab on sub level 15." It was Dr. Polski who answered her. "We have also loaded all of Dr. Langley's findings into the base computer."

"Thank you Dr. Polski." Dr. Grover turned to Dr. Langley. "Dr. Langley, what are your latest findings on the artifact?"

"Thank you Dr. Grover." Dr. Langley said as he stood up. His career had been going pretty well until he had released a paper about a new theory on alien influence in the development of the species. He had thought the paper would open some eyes to new possibilities and generate some discussion. Instead, he had been ostracized by both the public and scientific community. It had been career suicide. In the aftermath, his only choices were to either head this mission or be forced into early retirement; very early retirement. But now he saw this as his second chance. This would put him back in good standing with the scientific community. After this, he would have his pick of jobs. "We have managed to figure out what most of the probe does. The technology is pretty simple and comparable to our own technology from about 100 years ago. There are instruments for measuring cosmic rays, radiation, UV light, infrared radiation; it's all pretty standard stuff. There is even a simple camera. There are only three things we haven't been able to figure out. The first is what powers it. We know that is runs on electricity but we can't find anything that looks like a battery."

"Could it have been destroyed by the collision the probe had?" It was asked by one of the Dr. Polski's staff.

"I have considered that but we just don't know. The damage is not all the great, but it could have been where the batteries attached. That is something we all get to figure out. The second thing is a canister of radio active material. There are electrical wires going to it but we have no idea what it's for. It contains a material that is highly toxic and judging by the level of decay, I would say that it is over 500,000 years old." Dr. Langley knew that he should have included the grad students in that conclusion, but they were young in their careers and he needed this more than they did. He continued "The last is the strangest part. It's a solid gold piece on the outside of the probe. It has no function that we can determine."

"How do you know that it has no function?" This time it was Bob Richardson asking.

"There are no electrical circuits to it. There are some markings on it, but we haven't been able to figure what they mean."

"Well gold is a great material for blocking x-rays, maybe it is protecting something." It was another of Dr. Polski's staff.

"I had thought of that and I believe there is a cavity behind it. I didn't want to remove it until we had it in a secure lab. Whatever it is, it must be something pretty important to encase in that much gold." Dr. Langley sat down, indicating that he was done.

Dr. Grover immediately spoke up. "Thank you Dr. Langley. Given the limited equipment you had onboard your ship; you and your staff have done a great job." She turned her attention to the rest of the people in the room. I know you are all excited to get to work on this so we'll conclude this meeting. Dr. Polski, I expect a status report at the end of each day. The President is very anxious to know what we find here."

At that, everyone got up and began walking out to door, talking in little groups.

Three weeks later

"I tell you, it's a battery!" Kelly Granger said.

Dr. Grover decided to make a little visit to the lab to see how things were going. She hadn't expected to walk into the middle of an argument. Dr. Grover had remembered what it was like when she was a grad student, doing slave labor so others could take the credit. She had felt sorry for them so took it upon herself to get to know each one of them. Kelly Granger was the brightest of all the grad students. She had a knack of remembering just about everything she heard or read. She was getting a reputation as the walking encyclopedia. Dr. Grover had watched the discussion go on for a few minutes and had to give Kelly some credit. It took a lot of guts to stand up to both Dr. Langley and Dr. Polski. But she could see that tempers were starting to flare and no one thought clearly when they got emotional. "Ladies and Gentlemen, please. We are all reasonable people. What is going on here?"

Kelly was about to speak, but Dr. Polski spoke up first. "We are having a difference of opinion on the purpose of the container that radio active material. We identified the material and to tell you the truth, it's the most disturbing thing we have found yet."

"Why is that? What is the material?" Dr. Grover could see that Kelly really wanted to say something, but Dr. Grover gave her a look that let her know that she would have her turn.

"It's a material that can only be created artificially. About two hundred years ago, some scientist created some of the stuff. It was determined that it could be used to make a very devastating bomb and that it was also extremely toxic. As such, it was banned. Knowing that this material can be used in bomb and as a toxin, it could only mean that this probe was meant for hostile use."

"That's not necessarily true!" Kelly could contain herself no more.

"And thus our difference of opinion." Dr. Polski added dryly before Kelly could continue. Dr. Polski had been in charge of this secret lab for over 5 years and had working on many classified projects. He was a man who enjoyed his job and was not bothered by its sometimes questionable nature. He had published many papers through the years and was well known in the scientific community. As for this situation, although he thought Kelly to be impetuous, bordering on rude for speaking back to full scientists, he much more enjoyed how she seemed to get under Dr. Langley's skin. Besides, her theories, regardless of how wild, did seem to have some merit to them.

"What do you mean?" Dr. Grover asked Kelly.

Dr. Langley just shook his head as Kelly started to tell her explanation again. "There is a paper that was done by a Dr. Xing. In it he proposes that you can generate electricity from radio active material. From what I remember of the paper, I believe this is such a setup."

"But why would anyone create such a potentially dangerous source of power when you can use a small fusion pack? It would be the same size, would work in the same harsh conditions and would be much safer! What you are saying just doesn't make sense. Any intelligent race of beings wouldn't create such a dangerous thing." This time it was Dr. Langley speaking with a lot of passion.

"What if they never developed the fusion generator? What if this was created before they developed such technology?" Kelly replied, not backing down one inch.

"So now you are saying that some race, that never developed Fusion Generators, somehow developed the technology to travel between solar systems to explore our system? That just doesn't make sense!" Dr. Langley continued.

"You're assuming that they sent it here on purpose. If you look at the age of the device and the fact that the radio active material is completely depleted, you come to a different conclusion!"

"Not that theory again, that's just pure craziness. Please the only logic conclusion is that it was a functioning probe until it hit some space rock. Either they flew to the edge of our system and launched or it had some type of booster that allowed it to travel between the stars."

"Wait a minute." Dr. Grover interrupted. "What theory is this?"

Kelly took a deep breath and after giving Dr. Langley a hard stare, turned to Dr. Grover. "In the early days of space exploration, we sent out probes, similar to this one, to explore the outer planets. Those probes are still traveling somewhere beyond our solar system. My theory is that another race built this to explore their solar system. The probe then left their system and traveled into ours."

"That's just pure crazy." Dr. Langley blurted out.

Dr. Grover just ignored Dr. Langley's comments. "But at the speeds those probes were traveling, it would take thousands of centuries to reach another system."

"Given the carbon dating and dating from the decay of the radio active material, I would say about 500 centuries." Kelly continued. That caused Dr. Grover to think a bit. Kelly continued. "It could also explain the solid gold object and cover plate we found."

Dr. Langley let out a snort. He had obviously heard this before.

Dr. Grover asked, "How's that?"

"Well, what if the people that built this thought far enough ahead that this might be found by another race?"

"Like some cosmic message in a bottle?" Dr. Grover asked.

"Exactly! We did something similar to our probes. My guess is that the disc is some message from them and the markings on the cover tell us how to access that message."

"Please, I've heard enough of this wild speculation." Dr. Langley said as he walked away.

"Hmm. That's a very interesting theory. Write it up for me will you please." Dr. Grover said to Kelly.

"Oh I can't believe you think there is any validity to this 'Message in a Bottle' theory!" Dr. Langley said as he turned back to the group.

"At this point Doctor, I am not ruling out anything thing." Dr. Grover said to Dr. Langley. Dr. Langley just turned and stormed off. She continued, "Are we sure this probe wasn't created by own specie? How positive are we that this was created outside our solar system? Could it be even be one of those old probes?"

It was Dr. Polski that answered her. "We are 100% sure it is not one of our own probes as it doesn't match anything that was sent out in the early days. As for being created outside this solar system, we are very sure. Many of the materials have impurities that are not found in any manufacturing facility in this solar system. Not to mention the toxic material in that container. We have no facility anywhere that can create that material."

"Well, all theories aside, that fact that this is proof of intelligent life outside this solar system it pretty big news." Dr. Grover said to no-one particular. It had the affect of making both Dr. Polski and Kelly both stop and think. They had been so caught up in the find that they had forgotten what the ramifications would mean to the public.

Eight months later

"Excuse me Mr. President; I wanted to give you an updated on the research being done by the Dr. Grover and her team" General King said. They were in the President's private study. The President liked to come here at night before bed. It gave him a chance to read the newspaper and feel like a regular person.

"What research is that?" President O'Brian asked, indicating for the General to take a sit on the other side of the desk from him. General King was had become a close advisor and a good friend. The General was one of the few people who were allowed to disturb him in his study.

"Remember the space probe some of her people found?" The General said as he sat down.

"Oh yes. Well, what did they find and spare me the scientific mumbo-jumbo, please." The President said, holding his head in a mock headache.

"Yes sir. Well Dr. Grover and her team a pretty sure that this is a probe for exploring planets. It currently does not work, but they are not sure if the impact it had was the cause of that or not. The technology is pretty simple and comparable to our own from a century ago or so. There is some heated debate about a possible power source. They believe they have also found some type of message device, but they have been unable to read anything off it. The biggest finding is that they are sure the object was created outside our solar system."

"What's this message device?"

"It's a round disk made of solid gold. It was protected by a solid gold cover that had some markings on it. They believe the markings indicate how to access the information on the disk, but they have had no luck deciphering it yet. They have tried every known method of accessing it and have gotten nothing."

"Gold? Solid gold? I guess whoever built it must be rich."

"Yes sir" General King said, patronizing the President for not seeing the big picture. How his man ever got to be President was a mystery to him. "There is an issue of national security. There was a container of a poisonous material. I have been informed that this material can be used to make a radioactive bomb or if spread into the atmosphere; it would poison everyone on the planet. Very nasty stuff."

"You think this was an attack then?" concern entering the President's voice.

"The scientists are not sure. There is a theory that this could be used as some type of battery and that the battery is now used up. If it was intended as a weapon, it was in a very poor delivery system."

"You said that they are sure this was created by an alien race? So are they trying to attack us? Should we put together a proper response?"

"I think it's a little too early to be talking about a 'proper response'. I think first we have to figure out who sent it and where they live. The biggest finding is the fact that this was created by an intelligence not our own."

"Any why is that such a big thing?"

The General though "the President can be such an idiot". But he said, "This is proof that there is intelligent life outside our own. How do you think the public is going to react to this? What about the religious right? They might take exception to any evidence that there is life out there."

"Oh. I hadn't thought of that. And those people voted for me." The President paused for a moment. "Do you think there is anything else to be found by studying the device?"

"No sir. Dr. Grover has pretty much concluded that the only thing left to find is what the disk holds. They have also made a request to try to build a battery to see if the theory is correct. That would require them to use material that was banned by international treaty over 100 years ago. I have tried to convince them that would not happen, but they are very persistence. If it got out that your administration created this material, it would not only be political suicide but it would destabilize the balance of power in the world, sir."

"Oh, well this is turning into quite the mess. Those egg heads will push and push to be allowed to do their experiment, and if news of the artifact gets out, then it will cause social chaos." The President paused to think of his options. "What do you think we should do?"

"I think we should make the whole thing go away. The good news is that all the players are contained in one place. A small accident should make it all go away. As for the aliens, whoever they are, we need to start building a defense for them, in case they are hostile. Better safe than sorry sir."

"Oh? Make it all go away?"

"I have arranged for an accident with some fertilizer at the facility. We have a full cover story ready for the media."

The President thought a bit about this. "That WOULD seem to make it all go away." A short pause. "But wasn't there a ship and its crew involved?"

"Yes, but both are at Tranquility base. The crew, a husband and wife would not leave the base claiming they had salvage rights to the object. Since as far as anyone else is concerned, the ship, Dr. Langley and the grad students are somewhere at the outer edge of the solar system for the next year, people will just assume something happened to them when they don't return. Sometimes it's good to have all your eggs in one basket, sir."

"Ah, good thinking. Very tidy. I like that you anticipated my wishes on this. Good job General."

"Actually sir, we have had this contingency planned since the facility was built. That was why we pick the agricultural facility as the cover. We don't build top secret bases without some plan to covering it up quickly."

"I guess that makes sense." The President's face went long. "Too bad we will have to lose that gold disk."

"No we won't sir. I had it shipped to our cryptology lab here last week."

This removed the long expression from the President. "Okay then. That base will be costly to place. I guess I will have to go to congress to get the funds."

"Yes sir, but it is in the public's best interest that this never gets out. The public will be shocked enough at the loss of life."

"I understand. I guess it can't be helped." The President began looking at some papers on his desk.

"Anyway, here is a copy of the report on everything they found." General King handed him a folder with the report in it. "It includes a copy of the markings found on the device and on the gold cover. It even includes a pretty wild theory about the origin of the device. I apologize for scientific content of the report, but it couldn't be helped."

The President sighed. "I understand." He opened the folder and quickly thumbed through it. He stopped on the page that had the markings on it. Pointing to one and said, "What's that supposed to be?"

The General stood up and looked where he was pointing and said "The scientist found it on the craft itself and believe it mostly likely to the name of the probe."

"You mean this is some type of language? It looks like some type of scratches. See look at it yourself."

The General had read the report many times, but he humored the President. Printed on the paper was: **Voyager**. "Yes sir, but the scientists do believe it to be a name in some alien language."

"Hmmm." The President replied with a scowl on his face. "Okay. Anything else" he added as he closed the folder and tossed it on his desk.

"No sir, that's it." The General was sure that would be the last time the President would open that file.

"Well, then have a nice night General." The President picked back up his paper and continued reading.

The General got up and walked out the door. As he closed the door to the study, he thought to himself, "It's sad that all those people have to die at the base, but the public is just

not really for proof of life outside our own. Whether they meant to or not, whoever sent that probe has just caused the death of hundreds of people and destroyed an entire base. If that doesn't constitute an act of war, I don't know what does. This was definitely not the best first impression."

Author: Michael Chrisman (2006)